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AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
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TO: Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, Mayor
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Don Knabe

FROM: John Naimo
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT –
JANUARY 1 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2015**

This memorandum is to provide you with information about the Auditor-Controller's Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) Program for the period of January 1 through June 30, 2015.

Background

The Ombudsman serves as an advocate for children placed in group homes (GH) by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The Ombudsman provides a confidential and informal process to resolve issues that arise from children residing in GHs. The Ombudsman responds to requests for assistance (requests), which are generally received through a toll-free hotline, e-mail, and periodic site visits. The Ombudsman hotline number and e-mail address are included on posters which are required to be displayed in every County-contracted GH. In addition, Ombudsman staff conduct routine site visits encouraging children to call the hotline if they need assistance in resolving GH problems.

Upon receiving a request for assistance, the Ombudsman interviews the requester to obtain sufficient information to understand the situation and attempts to determine an appropriate response and/or course of action. The Ombudsman may also contact other parties, including DCFS personnel, GH providers, or others as needed to gather additional information, and also to facilitate a reasonable solution that is within the children's rights and established regulations.

According to the DCFS Child Welfare Services – June 2015 Fact Sheet (located at <http://www.lacdcfs.org/aboutus/factsheets.html>), 1,129 Los Angeles County children were placed in 163 GHs located within and outside the County.

Summary of Requests for Assistance

During this six-month reporting period, we received a total of 139 requests for assistance (116 via telephone and 23 during site visits). For comparison, the Ombudsman hotline received 151 requests and 112 requests in each of the prior two reporting periods, respectively. Attachment I specifies the types of requests for assistance received by the Ombudsman.

Overall, 103 (74%) of the 139 requests (9 physical safety, 39 personal rights, and 55 “other” issues), were resolved within the Ombudsman’s purview. Attachment II identifies the GHs involved with the 103 requests for assistance. In order to ensure proper resolution of the requests, we completed various communications and referrals to DCFS’ Children’s Social Workers (CSWs), Child Protection Hotline, Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD), Contract Administration Division (CAD), Public Inquiry Unit, and Youth Development Ombudsman. In addition, the Ombudsman frequently communicated and coordinated with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman, Probation GH Monitoring and Investigations Unit, State Community Care Licensing, GH staff/management, and occasionally other counties to ensure the requester’s issues were fully addressed, and that proper agencies were notified of any issues.

The remaining 36 requests involved individuals seeking general information (25 requests for information pertaining to GHs and 11 requests that were non-GH related). In such cases, the Ombudsman provided an answer or directed the requester to the appropriate party.

We noted that Rosemary Children’s Services accounted for 22% of the total requests for assistance we received during this period. The majority were received during an outreach visit conducted with the Probation Ombudsman. The joint visit allowed us to speak with all of the residents together, which created a larger forum for youth to express themselves. DCFS’ CAD Compliance Unit conducted a follow-up visit, and did not note any areas of significant concern at the GH. However, we will continue to work with DCFS and perform additional outreach to youth placed in this and other GHs with higher volumes of assistance requests.

The following are examples of hotline requests received and resolved within the purview of the Ombudsman during this reporting period:

- A youth called the Ombudsman and requested assistance resolving a conflict with GH rules requiring that showers be taken by 8:30 p.m., and prohibiting phone calls

after that time. Specifically, this youth stated that on Saturdays she went on all-day visits with her father, and returned to the group home after 8p.m. Because of the late return time, the youth reported that she was not always able to take a shower and call her grandmother before 8:30 p.m. The Ombudsman spoke with the Program Director, explained the youth's situation, and requested accommodation for the youth on Saturdays to ensure that she could take a shower and call her grandmother after returning from visiting her father. The Program Director agreed to the accommodation and informed staff. The Ombudsman followed up with the youth and verified that the accommodation met her needs.

- During an outreach visit, a youth reported that her glasses were recently broken and she needed a replacement pair. The Ombudsman observed that the youth could not read the Ombudsman brochure unless she held it close to her face. The youth was scheduled to start summer school and was concerned she would not be able to complete her schoolwork without glasses. The Ombudsman requested that the CSW expedite the paperwork to replace the youth's glasses, and notified OHCMD and CAD about this youth's need. The Ombudsman also requested that temporary glasses be purchased at a local drug store until the replacement pair was ready. The Ombudsman verified that the youth received temporary glasses that same week, and a new pair of permanent glasses for summer school.

Outreach

One of the Ombudsman's responsibilities is to visit GHs, and provide DCFS children and GH staff with information about the Ombudsman function. GH monitoring reports are reviewed, and visits are prioritized based on concerns reported by residents or information obtained from the Sybil Brand Commission, Commission for Children and Families, and DCFS Special Audit Committee referrals. In addition, requests received from GH residents may trigger additional announced and/or unannounced visits.

During this reporting period, the Ombudsman visited 40 GHs (run by 21 agencies). Fifteen of those GH visits were conducted with the Probation Ombudsman because some group homes have both DCFS and Probation-placed youth. The joint outreach visits increase awareness and clarity about the resources available to GH residents. In total, including visits with the Probation Ombudsman, we met with 259 children and provided them with verbal presentations and flyers/brochures. During these visits, GH residents had the opportunity to ask questions and request assistance. Attachment III identifies the GH site visits completed during the reporting period.

Conclusion

We will continue to conduct GH visits during the next reporting period, and coordinate with the Probation Ombudsman where group homes have both DCFS and Probation-

placed youth. We will also continue to ensure that lines of communication remain open with youth residing in group homes so they receive assistance when needed.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call me or your staff may contact Michelle Day, Children's Group Home Ombudsman, at (213) 893-0551 or via e-mail at mday@auditor.lacounty.gov.

JN:RGC:GZ:GH:md

Attachments

c: Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer
Philip L. Browning, Director, DCFS
Fesia Davenport, Interim Director, Office of Child Protection
Jerry E. Powers, Chief Probation Officer
Audit Committee
Children's Deputies
Commission for Children and Families
Contracts Administration Division, DCFS
Out-of-Home Care Management Division, DCFS
Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance, Probation
Jessica Gama, Probation Ombudsman
Public Information Office
Sybil Brand Commission

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED
BY TYPE**

January 1, 2015 through June 30, 2015

1. Safety Concerns	9
Expressing Self-Harm	5
Fear, Threats, Intimidation, Isolation	1
Improper Restraining Techniques by Staff	1
Lack of Supervision	1
Physical Harm	1
2. Personal Rights Concerns	39
Respect	12
Food	8
Clothing/Clothing Allowance	7
Health/Medical, Dental, Psychiatric Care	3
Family/Social Contacts	3
Living Conditions	3
Verbal Abuse by Staff	2
School	1
3. "Other" Concerns	55
Children's Social Worker (CSW) and/or Attorney Contact	16
Lack of Confidentiality/Privacy	6
Placement Concerns	5
Concerns about CSW	4
Unfair Consequences	4
Family Visitation	4
Retrieving Personal Belongings/Property	3
Transportation Concerns	3
Grievance Process at Group Home (GH)	2
Peer Difficulties	2
Supplemental Benefits	2
Emancipation/Transitional Housing	1
Favoritism by GH Staff	1
Homework Assignments	1
Hygiene Products	1
4. All Issue Types Above - Total	103
5. General Information	36
GH Related	25
Non-GH Related	11
6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsman	139

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED
BY GROUP HOME**

January 1, 2015 through June 30, 2015

Group Home Agency	Supervisory District / Out of County	Number of Requests	Types of Issues
Maryvale	1	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Concerns about Children's Social Worker (CSW) •Family Visitation •Lack of Confidentiality
West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope, Inc., Casa Esperanza Treatment Center	1	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Respect (2) •School
San Gabriel Children's Center	1, 5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Peer Difficulties
Eggleston Youth Centers, Inc.	1, 5, San Bernardino County	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Contact
DeliLu Achievement Home	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Respect (2)
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Unfair Consequences •Retrieving Personal Belongings/Property •Lack of Privacy •Respect
South Bay Bright Future	2, 4	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Contact
Los Angeles Youth Network	3	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clothing
Phoenix House	3	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Food •Physical Harm
Project Six Group Home - The Help Group	3	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Contact
Children Are Our Future	3, 5	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Transportation Concerns (2) •Clothing •Lack of Privacy
Human Services Network d.b.a. Youth Services Network	3, 5	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Health/Medical, Dental, Psychiatric Care (2) •Expressing Self-Harm
Penny Lane Centers	3, 5	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Unfair Consequences (3) •Family Contact •Family Visitation •Favoritism by Group Home (GH) Staff •Food •Living Conditions •Retrieving Personal Belongings/Property •Supplemental Benefits
Bayfront Youth & Family Services	4	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Food (4) •Lack of Privacy (2) •Grievance Process at GH •Improper Restraining Techniques by Staff

Group Home Agency	Supervisorial District / Out of County	Number of Requests	Types of Issues
Dream Home Care, Inc.	4	1	•Social Contact
Olive Crest	4	1	•Peer Difficulties
Star View Adolescent Center (Community Treatment Facility)	4	3	•Expressing Self-Harm (3)
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services	5	11	•CSW Contact (3) •Placement Concerns (2) •Respect (2) •Clothing •Concerns about CSW •Food •Lack of Confidentiality
Hillsides Home for Children	5	2	•Concerns about CSW •Expressing Self-Harm
Macro Homes, Inc.	5	3	•Clothing •Family Visitation •Transportation Concerns
McKinley Children's Center	5	1	•Family Contact
Murrell's Farm and Boys Home	5	3	•CSW Contact (2) •Fear, Threat, Intimidation, Isolation
Rosemary Children's Services	5	23	•CSW and Attorney Contact (8) •Respect (3) •Living Conditions (2) •Placement Concerns (2) •Clothing •Emancipation/Transitional Housing •Food •Grievance Process at GH •Hygiene Products •Retrieving Personal Belongings /Property •Supplemental Benefits •Family Visitation
Turmont Home for Girls	5	1	•Homework Assignments
Childhelp - Costa Mesa	Orange County	1	•Respect
Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange County	4	•Clothing •Health/Medical, Dental, Psychiatric Care •Lack of Supervision •Placement Concerns
Mary's Shelter	Orange County	1	•Concerns about CSW
Paragon Center	Orange County	3	•Verbal Abuse (2) •Respect
West Covina Group Home	San Bernardino County	1	•Clothing Allowance
	TOTAL	103	

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
GROUP HOME SITE VISITS FOR OUTREACH**

January 1, 2015 through June 30, 2015

Group Home Agency	Number of Sites	Supervisorial District(s) / Out of County	Site Visit Location(s)
St. Anne's Maternity Home*	1	1	•Los Angeles
Eggleston Youth Centers, Inc.*	8	1, 5, San Bernardino County	•Irwindale
Fred Jefferson Memorial Home	2	2	•Compton (2)
New Concept*	1	2	•Los Angeles
Orange County Children's Foundation	1	2	•Carson
T & T Home for Boys	1	2	•Carson
South Bay Bright Future Youth Center	3	2, 4	•Harbor City •San Pedro (2)
Turmont Home for Boys and Girls	2	2, 5	•Carson •Lancaster
Fleming & Barnes, Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent Care Facilities	3	2, 4, 5	•Carson •Lancaster •Long Beach *
Los Angeles Youth Network	1	3	Los Angeles
Lifecircle Unlimited, Inc. dba Lifecircle Group Home	1	3	•Pacoima
Project Six Group Home - The Help Group	1	3	•Van Nuys
Bayfront Youth and Family Services*	1	4	•Long Beach
Olive Crest Residential Treatment Center*	1	4	•Bellflower
Macro Homes, Inc.	1	5	•Lancaster
McKinley Children's Center	1	5	•San Dimas
Murrell's Farm and Boys Home	2	5	•Lancaster (2)
Phoenix House*	1	5	•Lakeview Terrace
Rosemary Children's Services*	5	5	•Pasadena (5)
United Youth Homes**	2	5	•Monrovia (2)
Crittenton Services for Children and Families*	1	Orange County	•Fullerton
Total	40		

*Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Ombudsman

** Non-Contracted Group Home